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U.S. declines to prosecute in mail openings by the CIA

Washington (AP)—The Justice Department said yesterday it will not prosecute CIA employees who took part in a secret program of opening overseas mail from 1953 to 1973.

The department said that after a lengthy investigation it concluded it is unlikely convictions could be obtained if charges were brought.

Under the 20-year mail surveillance program, the CIA opened letters addressed to thousands of Americans from such countries as the Soviet Union and Communist China.

In a lengthy report, the Justice Department acknowledged that the mail openings "would be unlawful if undertaken today."

None the less, the report said there will be no prosecutions because of the unavailability of important evidence and the "state of the law that prevailed during the course of the mail openings program."

"It would be mistaken to suppose," the report said, "that it was always clearly perceived that the particular mail opening programs of the CIA were obviously illegal."

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